

Appreciating Art

Students Develop Crucial Skills Involving Creativity, Collaboration

A blank canvas can be intimidating. Or inspiring.

It can be threatening. Or liberating.

“That blank canvas,” said Pasqua Guzzi, who oversees the art department for the Manchester Public Schools: “That blank canvas makes you use parts of your brain that you don’t otherwise use.”



Ms. Guzzi

Manchester Public Schools are deeply committed to arts education, with a staff of 20 instructors who work with students from pre-K through high school. Work done in art classes supports crucial district initiatives designed to prepare all students to be lifelong learners and contributing members

of society.

“We stress creativity, collaboration, courage and excellence for all,” said Superintendent Matt Geary, “and certainly a strong arts program gives students opportunities to develop and demonstrate the kinds of skills and habits of mind that are needed



Ann Reimels (above), Jacki Sweeney (right) and Pasqua Guzzi are the Bennet art teachers.

to be successful in the 21st Century.”

The pre-K instruction is actually new this year, as teachers Jacki Sweeney and Heidi Eckert travel throughout town, visiting classrooms once a week and introducing 3- and 4-year olds to materials and skills that – for some – will be used for a lifetime.

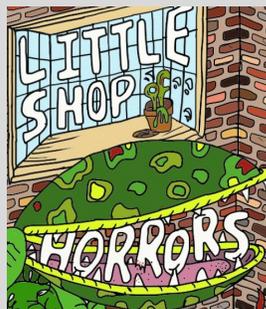
As students progress through the system, they are introduced to an increasingly varied array of materials and challenged to develop their skills. In high

Cont. on Page 2

INSIDE

Spring Musical

This year’s MHS spring musical is a funny, fast-paced show about — get this — a plant from outer space that eats blood. If you’ve never seen “Little Shop of Horrors” — here’s your chance. The MHS spring musical is March 17-19 in Bailey Auditorium; you can get tickets at the door.



Page 3

Alumni Updates

A pilot. A judge. A Broadway actor and more. Manchester High School graduates are making their mark in many ways and we have a few of their stories.

Page 4

Cover Story, Continued

school – where classes are taken as electives – they are able to choose from an impressive menu that include everything from jewelry to wheel throwing to comic design.

“Our high school art department course offerings are among the best around,” Pasqua said, “and our students do really really well in competitions, which is one indication of how strong our department is.”

Studies have long shown that involvement in the arts is associated with gains in math, reading, cognitive ability, critical thinking, and verbal skills. Likewise, students involved with the arts demonstrate greater motivation, concentration, confidence, and teamwork skills as compared to those who have little or no arts instruction.

Arts instruction also has been cited as a critical factor in addressing the achievement gap.

Notably, a 2012 report from the National Endowment for the Arts showed that, “by nearly every indicator studied, a student from a low-socioeconomic (SES) background with a high-arts educational experience significantly outperformed peers from a low-arts, low-SES background, closing (and in some cases eliminating) the gap that often appears between low-SES students and their more advantaged peers.”

Anecdotes and insights from Manchester teachers are also revealing.

“Being able to experience art at a young age can really help inspire a young person’s imagination and confidence,” says Heidi Eckert, who in addition to teaching art at the Preschool Center also has classes at Verplanck Elementary and Keeney Elementary.

Art also fits nicely into the district’s movement toward more giving students personalized learning opportunities while also creating authentic products.

Said Ann Reimels, who teaches at Bennet: “Art class is one of the very few classes where kids can make something that is hands-on, visual, intensely creative -- try starting with a completely blank piece of paper or chunk of clay, for example -- and without the stress that academics brings.”

She adds: “Working in any art medium (clay, paint, fibers, color pencils) under any influence (famous artists, different genres, historical context, people groups, geographical locations) is stealth rigor -- kids consistently work hard and are happy, usually without realizing that they are learning about math, science, history, and, of course, communication with other humans.”

Sharon Punty, who teaches at Keeney, has similar thoughts.

“Students use art to communicate ideas even before they are proficient at written language,” she says. “Art allows students to relax. For some students it is one thing they do well in school. Other students enjoy tactile differences in handling art media. Often, for young children, art becomes an extension or a precursor to play.”

Leave it to one of the world’s most famous artists to have the last word on the subject.

“Every child is an artist,” Pablo Picasso once said. “The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up.”

Bennet Art Teachers

Mrs. Guzzi began her teaching career in the elementary schools. She then spent 14 years teaching at Bennet Middle School as a 7th and 8th grade teacher, but she especially loves teaching 6th grade art at Bennet. She is a graduate of the University of Connecticut (BFA) and Southern Connecticut State University (MS). Her favorite art media is painting and she enjoys working on her own art in her spare time. She lives with her husband, two daughters and two cats. She is most proud of her students when they challenge themselves to learn a new art skill.

Ms. Reimels has taught art or subbed at every school in Manchester. This is the first year she is teaching only at Bennet Academy. For her, sixth graders are an exciting bunch: they have great foundational skills and knowledge and they are excited to take their art projects to the next level. She started teaching art at Jumoke Academy in Hartford and has been teaching in the Manchester Public School system for more than 14 years.

Ms. Sweeney, a lifelong resident of Manchester and product of Manchester Public Schools, is delighted to return to the district as an itinerant art teacher at Bennet Academy, Manchester Preschool Center, and Bentley Alternative School. After receiving her BFA in Drawing with a Minor in Art History from University of Hartford, Jacki completed her teacher certification at Central CT State University. This is Jacki's second year as a full-time teacher after teaching art in a neighboring school district.



Don't Miss ...

LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS

**Manchester High School's
Spring Musical March 17-19**

MHS senior James Feeney (left) controls Twoey. Classmate Tim Diebolt is the voice of the plant and Ed Tyler (far right) the director.



This year's MHS spring musical is "a 1950's rock 'n roll musical comedy about a plant from outer space that eats blood."

That's how Tim Diebolt — the voice of the plant — describes "Little Shop of Horrors." There will be performances on Thursday, March 17 at 7 p.m. and on Friday and Saturday, March 18 and 19, at 8 p.m.

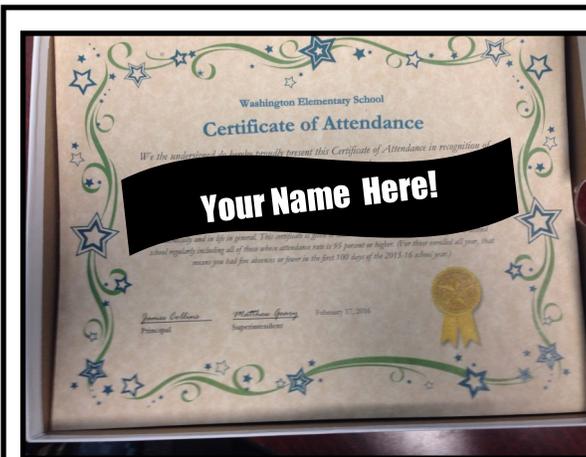
Tim is never on stage but James Feeney is, using levers to ensure that the puppet's mouth opens in synch with Tim's singing.

"That's the challenge," says Ed Tyler, who is

directing the show with assistant Amanda Lister. "But when you can take wood and chicken wire and cloth and turn it into a character that people can relate to — then you've got it."

Armando Osorio and Charlotte Rhodes have lead roles in the show, which includes lots well-known tunes including "Skid Row (Downtown)" and "Suddenly, Seymour."

Tickets are available from cast members or at the door (\$10 or \$8 for seniors) You can read more about it at www.MPSPrize.org.



Students Earn Recognition For 'Regular Attendance'

Children who attend school regularly enjoy many benefits that raise the likelihood of their success academically and in life in general.

But to these obvious benefits we have one more:

We are giving out certificates to students who have made a concerted effort to attend school regularly -- including all of those students whose attendance rate is 95 percent or higher.

The next set of certificates will be distributed after 140 school

days (in early April). For students enrolled all year, that means they will have had seven absences or fewer in the first 140 days of the 2015-16 school year.

Incidentally, some students achieve "perfect" attendance, never missing a day. That's terrific, but we understand that students are sometimes sick. When that's the case, students should stay home -- and we ask that parents/guardians call the office by 9 a.m. and also send in a note with your child when she or he returns.

We also encourage parents/guardians to contact the school if there are issues we can address -- such as if your child is anxious about school, and that is affecting attendance.

The bottom line -- parents and guardians play a critical role in getting children up and off to school on time each day. We hope the certificate incentive helps and look forward to continue working together as we strive to give all children every opportunity to leave our school system as lifelong learners and contributing members of society.

"I want to thank the teachers who made me realize how much potential I had."



John Rempe, MHS '09, is a pilot living in Los Angeles

The Sky's The Limit

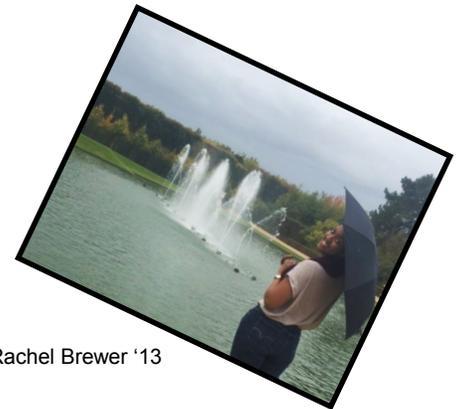
Manchester Public School Graduates Are Making Their Mark In The World



Taharri Turner, '94



Ken Francoeur, MHS '09 (with mom and dad)



Rachel Brewer '13



From left: Dr. Mark Laufer ('78), Marlee Coleman ('15), Leon Diana ('79) and Eric Gauvin aka "Gavin" ('01)

John Rempe, who graduated from MHS in 2009 and is now is a pilot for Compass Airlines, has words of advice for today's students: "Do not fear the unknown," he says. "Take the opportunities that are out there and don't look back. You'll be very surprised how well things work out."

Things are working out very well for many MHS grads, including:

- **Kenny Francoeur** ('09), who made his Broadway debut in Book of Mormon last fall.
- **Leo V. Diana** ('79), a Superior Court judge in

New London.

- **Taharri Turner** ('94), a health and physical education teacher in Dorchester, Mass.
- **Marlee Coleman** ('15), a freshman and standout soccer player at the University of Charleston.
- **Eric Gauvin** ('01), an on-air personality for KISS-FM (95.7).
- **Dr Marc R. Laufer** ('78), Chief of Gynecology at Boston Children's Hospital.
- **Rachel Brewer** ('13), studying Government & International Politics at George Mason University.